

Nursing Responses and Interventions for Episodes of Adolescent Distress in an Acute
Child and Adolescent Mental Health Inpatient Unit: An Interpretive Descriptive Study

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Statement of Originality

The thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to the final version of my thesis being made available worldwide when deposited in the University's Digital Repository, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

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Stephen Spencer

DEDICATION

Despite the many hours away from family working on this study, I would not change a thing. It has been a journey of personal and professional growth. However none of it could have been possible without the love, support, and understanding of my wonderful wife Emma, and daughters Ailish, Hannah and Bethany. I dedicate this work to them, knowing they have lived this journey as much as I have.

I would also like to dedicate this thesis to one particular young person I have nursed whose struggles became too much. At times when I felt like 'throwing in the towel' it was the memories of time spent with them during their struggle that provided the fuel for me to keep going, so that others in their position may prosper from this work. May the light finally shine on them.

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Table of Contents

SYNOPSIS	12
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	14
1.1 RESEARCHER BACKGROUND.....	14
1.2 MENTAL HEALTH OF ADOLESCENTS: THE CURRENT SITUATION	16
1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM.....	16
1.4 SIGNIFICANCE AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY	17
1.4.1 <i>Significance for Adolescents</i>	17
1.4.2 <i>Significance for Nurses</i>	17
1.4.3 <i>Significance for Mental Health Services</i>	18
1.5 RESEARCH QUESTION AND METHODOLOGY	18
1.6 THESIS STRUCTURE	19
CHAPTER 2 BACKGROUND	20
2.1 INTRODUCTION.....	20
2.2 ADOLESCENCE	20
2.2.1 <i>Adolescent development</i>	20
2.2.2 <i>Adolescent distress</i>	22
2.2.3 <i>The impact of technology and other social factors on adolescent development:</i> <i>Current contextual realities</i>	23
2.2.4 <i>Mental health problems during adolescence</i>	24
2.2.5 <i>Internalising and externalising behaviours</i>	24
2.2.6 <i>High risk behaviours: Suicide, deliberate self-harm (DSH), and aggression</i>	25
2.2.7 <i>Psychological trauma</i>	27
2.2.8 <i>Psychosocial stressors: Bullying, parental conflict, and life stress</i>	28
2.2.9 <i>Psychosis</i>	29
2.2.10 <i>Stigma</i>	29
2.3 ACUTE MENTAL HEALTH NURSING (MHN): CONTEXT AND EXPERIENCES	30
2.3.1 <i>Context</i>	30
2.3.2 <i>Experiences: The realities of mental health nursing</i>	31
2.3.3 <i>The roles of nurses working in acute mental health units</i>	32
2.3.4 <i>Attitudes of mental health nurses</i>	32
2.3.5 <i>Contextual factors influencing contemporary mental health nursing practice</i>	33
2.3.6 <i>Exposure to violence and aggression</i>	34

2.3.7	<i>Training programs designed to manage violence and aggression</i>	35
2.4	ACUTE CHILD AND ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH INPATIENT UNITS: CONTEXT AND CULTURE	36
2.4.1	<i>Environment</i>	38
2.4.2	<i>Rules and “norms”</i>	38
2.5	THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIPS IN THE CONTEXT OF CHILD AND ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH NURSING	39
2.6	RESPONSES AND INTERVENTIONS FOR ADOLESCENT INPATIENT DISTRESS.....	42
2.6.1	<i>Seclusion and restraint</i>	43
2.6.2	<i>PRN (when necessary) medication</i>	44
2.6.3	<i>De-escalation</i>	45
2.6.4	<i>Sensory modulation</i>	45
2.6.5	<i>Other responses used by nurses to manage adolescent distress</i>	46
2.6.6	<i>Personal perspective</i>	48
2.7	CONCLUSION	49
CHAPTER 3	LITERATURE REVIEW	51
3.1	LITERATURE REVIEW PURPOSE STATEMENT.....	51
3.2	SEARCH ENGINES/DATABASES	51
3.3	SEARCH LIMITS.....	51
3.4	INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION CRITERIA	52
3.5	SEARCH TERMS.....	52
3.6	SEARCH PROCESS.....	53
3.7	LITERATURE REVIEW	55
3.7.1	<i>Young people in acute inpatient mental health units: aggression, violence, deliberate self-harm, and interventions</i>	55
3.7.2	<i>Child and adolescent mental health nurses</i>	58
3.7.3	<i>Therapeutic relationships</i>	60
3.7.4	<i>Culture within acute child and adolescent mental health services</i>	60
3.7.5	<i>Mental health nursing interventions</i>	61
3.8	JUSTIFICATION FOR THE PROPOSED STUDY.....	64
CHAPTER 4	RESEARCH DESIGN	66
4.1	METHODOLOGY	66
4.2	RESEARCH QUESTION	68
4.3	SETTING: ACUTE CHILD AND ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH INPATIENT UNIT	68
4.4	METHODS	71

4.4.1	<i>Sampling approach</i>	71
4.4.2	<i>Proposed sampling for semi-structured interviews with adolescents</i>	72
4.4.3	<i>Participant recruitment</i>	72
4.4.4	<i>Data Collection Methods</i>	74
4.4.5	<i>Data analysis approach:</i>	77
4.5	RESEARCHER ASSUMPTIONS.....	81
4.6	TRUSTWORTHINESS AND ENSURING RIGOUR IN THE CONDUCT OF THE STUDY	83
4.7	ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS.....	85
CHAPTER 5	FINDINGS: STAGE 1	89
5.1	OBSERVATION FINDINGS	89
5.1.1	<i>Triggers and the context in which they occurred</i>	91
5.1.2	<i>Expression of distress: Adolescent coping and help-seeking actions</i>	99
5.1.3	<i>Engagement: Responses and interventions for working with distress.</i>	100
5.1.4	<i>Adolescent reactions and nurses' clinical decision making to manage distress</i> ...	108
5.1.5	<i>Outcomes: Escalation or resolution of distress</i>	110
5.1.6	<i>TAR³ Model</i>	116
CHAPTER 6	FINDINGS: STAGE 2	118
6.1	INTERVIEWS WITH NURSES.....	118
6.2	PROMOTING ENGAGEMENT: RESPONSES AND INTERVENTIONS TO MANAGE ADOLESCENT DISTRESS	120
6.2.1	<i>Responses and interventions used to manage adolescent distress and resultant outcomes: Escalation or resolution.</i>	121
6.2.2	<i>Therapeutic relationships: "Knowing your patient".</i>	132
6.2.3	<i>Being present:</i>	135
6.2.4	<i>Aligning interventions with the assessed level of distress:</i>	137
6.2.5	<i>Person-centred approach</i>	138
6.2.6	<i>Commitment to the safety of young people:</i>	140
6.3	CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH ENGAGING ADOLESCENTS IN DISTRESS.....	140
6.3.1	<i>Clinical experience: "Just don't know what to do"</i>	140
6.3.2	<i>Significant deliberate self-harm</i>	143
6.3.3	<i>Aggression and violence</i>	143
6.3.4	<i>The unit environment: Physical design and layout:</i>	144
6.3.5	<i>Milieu management and adolescent peer relationships</i>	145
6.3.6	<i>Unit procedures and routines</i>	148
6.3.7	<i>Safety of nurses: Professional and physical</i>	151

6.3.8	<i>Emotional impact on nurses</i>	153
6.4	CULTURE.....	156
6.4.1	<i>Safety in the work environment</i>	156
6.4.2	<i>“We are all so different”</i>	156
6.4.3	<i>Unit management, and teamwork:</i>	158
6.4.4	<i>Influence of unit culture on clinical decision-making</i>	159
6.4.5	<i>Environment: Climate and atmosphere</i>	161
6.4.6	<i>Conclusion</i>	161
CHAPTER 7	DISCUSSION	163
7.1	INTRODUCTION:.....	163
7.2	ACHIEVEMENT OF STUDY OBJECTIVES.....	164
7.3	RESEARCHER ASSUMPTIONS REVISITED.....	165
7.4	THESIS STATEMENT:.....	165
7.5	NURSING RESPONSES AND INTERVENTIONS USED TO MANAGE ADOLESCENT DISTRESS.....	166
7.5.1	<i>Types of nurse responses: Person-centred versus controlling/ restrictive.</i>	166
7.5.2	<i>Interventions: Nursing practices</i>	168
7.6	CULTURE AND CONTEXT.....	176
7.6.1	<i>Unit culture:</i>	176
7.6.2	<i>The ward environment (“therapeutic space”) with an emphasis on safety, security, empowerment:</i>	183
7.6.3	<i>Peer relationships</i>	188
7.7	THE PREFERRED APPROACH FOR RESPONDING TO ADOLESCENT DISTRESS:.....	189
7.7.1	<i>Knowing your patient:</i>	191
7.7.2	<i>Being present:</i>	193
7.7.3	<i>Ongoing assessment and clinical judgement:</i>	194
7.8	THE TAR ³ MODEL AND A PROPOSED CLINICAL RESPONSE AND INTERVENTION TOOL.....	196
7.9	SUPPORTING AND ADDING TO EXISTING KNOWLEDGE OF CHILD & ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH CARE: 201	
7.10	METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS:.....	206
7.11	TRUSTWORTHINESS: CREDIBILITY, CONFIRMABILITY, DEPENDABILITY AND TRANSFERABILITY.....	206
7.12	STUDY STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS:.....	208
7.13	IMPLICATIONS.....	210
7.14	CONCLUSION:.....	212
REFERENCES		215

APPENDIX 1: GLOSSARY.....	235
APPENDIX 2: SEARCH RESULTS TABLE	238
APPENDIX 3: LITERATURE REVIEW SUMMARY TABLE	255
APPENDIX 4: INFORMATION STATEMENT - NURSES	276
APPENDIX 5: INFORMATION STATEMENT – CLIENTS.....	280
APPENDIX 6: CONSENT FORM – NURSE OBSERVATIONS	285
APPENDIX 7: CONSENT FORM – CLIENTS	287
APPENDIX 8: CONSENT FORM - NURSE INTERVIEWS.....	289
APPENDIX 9: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....	291
APPENDIX 10: ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER	293
APPENDIX 11: OBSERVATION TEMPLATE.....	296
APPENDIX 12: RESEARCHER ON PREMISES POSTER	298
APPENDIX 13: RESEARCH AUDIT TRAIL.....	299
APPENDIX 14: OBSERVATION DATA TAR³ TABLE.....	308
APPENDIX 15: NURSE INTERVIEW TAR³ TABLE.....	318
APPENDIX 16: AXIAL CODING TABLE – INTERVIEW DATA.....	325
APPENDIX 17: REVIEW OF RESEARCHER ASSUMPTIONS	326
APPENDIX 18: EXAMPLE OF INDIVIDUALISED <i>AUTENOME</i> RESPONSE AND INTERVENTION PLAN.....	334

Table of Tables

TABLE 1: SUICIDE, NUMBER OF DEATHS IN CHILDREN AGED 5-17 YEARS BY MECHANISM AND SEX, AUSTRALIA, 2009-2013.
..... 26

Table of Figures

FIGURE 1: DIAGRAM REPRESENTING CONTINUUM OF NURSING INTERVENTIONS CONSISTENT WITH THE NSW MENTAL HEALTH ACT (2007) PRINCIPLE OF LEAST RESTRICTIVE CARE.	43
FIGURE 2: PRISMA FLOWCHART OUTLINING SEARCH STRATEGY AND RESULTS.	54
FIGURE 3: TAR ³ MODEL.....	117
FIGURE 4: DIAGRAM REPRESENTING DIFFERENT LEVELS OF DISTRESS AND THE TYPE OF COPING STRATEGIES USED TO MANAGE DISTRESS BY THE YOUNG PERSON	197
FIGURE 5: <i>AUTEENOME</i> RESPONSE AND INTERVENTION TOOL.....	199

Synopsis

Adolescents who experience acute mental health problems are often admitted to acute child and adolescent mental health inpatient units for care and treatment. Nurses, at times, are required to respond to episodes of distress that adolescents experience during the admission period. Nurses engage with young people who exhibit maladaptive and often high-risk behaviours that require appropriate interventions to help alleviate their distress. The majority of research conducted on child and adolescent mental health has focussed on quantitative methodologies examining the demographic and diagnostic characteristics of young people, treatment outcome measures, or the rate of coercive interventions such as seclusion, physical restraint, and *prn* medication.

There are numerous contextual factors that influence nursing practice. This study aimed to understand which nursing responses and interventions were most helpful in resolving distress for adolescents admitted to an acute child and adolescent mental health inpatient unit. An interpretive descriptive study was undertaken to explore the contextual and experiential components of providing nursing responses and interventions for episodes of adolescent distress. This approach is suited to the subtle but complex nature of the clinical setting and understanding the interactions between nurses and adolescents.

Following a review of the relevant literature, and documentation of the researcher's assumptions, two methods were used to collect data. Non-participant observations focussing on interactions between adolescents (aged 13-17) experiencing episodes of distress and nurses who responded to them were conducted. The second-stage of data collection, semi-structured interviews ($n = 10$) were conducted with nurses working in the inpatient unit.

Both data sets were analysed using Thorne's three-stage interpretive descriptive method. The open, axial and selective coding process produced themes and sub-themes that provided a deeper understanding of how adolescents experience episodes of distress in the acute inpatient mental health setting, and the cultural and contextual factors that not only trigger these episodes, but also on the nurses who provide care for them at these times.

Young people experienced and displayed their distress in numerous ways and nurses used a range of responses and interventions to assist them. The importance of a person-centred approach was evident and there were multiple cultural and contextual

factors that influenced both the young people's experiences during the admission, and nursing practices.

An observation model of responding to adolescent distress, and a clinical tool that integrates findings from both data sets were developed as a result of this study. These will provide the impetus for education and training, policy and organisational change, and future research in this area of mental health nursing care.